



Exploring Students' Perceptions Regarding Teaching English as Foreign Language: A Case Study of BS Students at Institute of Southern Punjab

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Abstract

This study has investigated English Language Teaching (ELT) in Pakistan from the perspective of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study has looked into the teachers' perceptions of ELT, learners' perceptions of English language learning, nature of gender-based ELT and teacher-learner interaction thereof, and impediments encountered by teachers and learners during EFL teaching-learning process at 4-year BS English program of public and private sector universities of Pakistan. A structured interview proforma was used to collect the responses from ELT experts who were selected by employing the convenient sampling technique. Meanwhile, the interview responses were analyzed qualitatively. The results indicated that EFL learners perceived the Grammar Translation Method best for English language learning process whereas EFL teachers considered the Activity-based Interactive Method best for English language pedagogic process. The learners preferred good pronunciation and learning the use of grammatical rules unlike the teachers who preferred communicative competence as the most important outcome of English language pedagogic process. The learners considered that the male EFL teachers teach more effectively than the female EFL teachers being conceptually clearer and better at imparting knowledge. The results of the male and female learners showed a significant difference between the male and female teachers towards teacher-learner interaction whereas the results of the male and female teachers did not show any significant difference between their genders towards teacher-learner interaction in EFL classroom settings. Based on the findings of the study, it has been recommended that policy reforms in English language curricula, pedagogical practices and assessment techniques should be introduced to synchronize the perceptions about ELT and gender-based teacher-learner interaction in Pakistan.

Keywords; English language curricula, Activity-based Interactive Method, ELT, gender-based teacher-learner interaction, Teaching English as FL

Introduction

The language teaching which emphasized grammar and translation was soon criticized and a new method was introduced (Alibekova & Urinboeva, 2020). In 1867 Claude Marcel advocated the abolition of translation and grammar rules and the teaching of language first through comprehension of texts. He suggested the teaching of language through abundant listening, then through the reading of simple and familiar material, followed later by speaking and writing. As a reaction against the grammar translation method, in 1866 Heness had started a private school for teaching languages by a natural method, whose assumption is that language learners learn a foreign language in the same a child learn the first language. In 1880 Francois Gouin also added a new element to language teaching: physical activity. The idea proposed by Gouin was relatively new at that time but it was first ignored. At the same time the reaction to the grammar translation method also came from Vietor.

Chen et al. (2021) proposed a new approach to language teaching by using the spoken language as a starting point and providing descriptive phonetics. In his approach new materials were taught through gestures and pictures and through the use of words already known. The grammar was also taught but done in inductive way through the study of texts. His approach was also known the Phonetic Method or Reform Method. The methods proposed by Gouin and Vietor might have given rise to the Direct Method. At the beginning of the twentieth the Direct Method had a definite pattern and the term "Direct Method" was established. The method maintained the principle that no use of the learners' language, the typical text started with the spoken language, and reading and writing came later. However, as the principles of the Direct Method spread there was more and more compromise with them in order to meet the growing demands for measurable standards of accuracy. The development of the principles included vocabulary exercise and systematic drills of grammar. Even, at a more advanced level translation was included. At all levels certain standards of correctness were required. Finally, the Direct Method almost lost its typical features.

Literature review

According to Setiyadi, (2020) Language teaching is influenced by ideas on the nature of language (language theories) and the learning conditions that make learners to acquire the language (learning theories). Differences in language theories may affect the selection of the teaching materials and differences in learning theories may affect the teaching methods. A method that is based on the assumption that we learn another language as a child learns his native language (L1) will differ from one based on the assumption that learning a foreign language is not the same as learning a mother tongue. It may be argued that the actual teaching of English in Indonesia may differ from the English teaching in Malaysia or teaching English in the United States of America, in which people should learn English in the conditions where the language is used for communication in their daily lives. Some people prefer to call the former learning English as a foreign language and the latter learning English as a second language. Not all people agree with the distinction between second language and foreign language.

Krashen (1982) states that second language acquisition includes learning a new language in a foreign language context (e.g. English in Mexico or German in the United States) as well as learning a new language in a host language environment (e.g. German in Germany). Vattoy (2020) uses the term second language (L2) to refer to both foreign and host languages and the teaching methods apply to the acquisition of both (1982: 11). It implies that the way to teach English as a second language is not necessarily different from the way to teach English as a foreign language, and whether English is learned in Indonesia or in Malaysia, English is called the target language (TL). Even though they seem not to agree the distinction between second language and foreign language, Krashen (1985: 8) differentiates the two different ways of gaining a target language. He states that there are two ways of developing ability in a target language: "acquisition" and "learning". Acquisition is defined as a subconscious process that is identical to the process used in first language acquisition in all important ways, while learning is defined as conscious knowing about a target language. While acquisition is taking place, language learners are not always aware of the results; they are not very concerned with grammatical rules and error correction. They are gaining a target language by living in the society where the language is used in their daily lives. When language learners talk about the rules of a target language, they correct errors, and people in the society do not speak the target language, they are learning the target language. English is learned in Indonesia by talking about the grammatical rules of English and errors are always corrected. For language learners in Indonesia, where English is not spoken in the society, accuracy is really the focus in learning English. It is not the case when people learn English in countries where English is spoken in the society, such as in the United States or Malaysia. People in those countries emphasize on the ability and fluency in communications of daily lives; they acquire English because they are exposed to the language in the society. They are not always aware of the process of gaining the language. Referring to the theory of gaining a target language mentioned above, the process of gaining English in Indonesia is regarded more as learning while in Malaysia more as acquisition. Even though some people may disagree with the

distinction between the term second language and foreign language, it is not denied that the status of English in Indonesia is different from that in Malaysia (Curran, 1976).

When people (Makhmudov, 2020) learn another language, their mother tongue sometimes interferes with the target language. This phenomenon is often called interference. Interference is often caused by the similarities between their mother tongue and the target language. How their mother tongue interferes with a new language depends on whether they are learning to speak the new language or simply they are learning to understand the language by listening and reading. The possibility of transfer from L1 can be negative or positive interference. If they are learning to speak the target language, the similarities between the two languages may cause much difficulty. They will use their knowledge of their mother tongue and based on the knowledge they may produce utterances which do not exist in the target language (Dickerson, 1975). The negative interference may result in errors but learners' errors are not necessarily caused by the interference of their mother tongue. Different people may have proposed different classifications of errors (Corder, 1974 and Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982); the following types of errors and their examples are taken from Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:154-162) a. Omission: the absence of an item(s) that must appear in a well-formed utterance Example : Mary president new company* b. Double markings: the failure to delete certain items which are required in some linguistic construction Example : He doesn't knows my name* c. Regularization: applying the rules used to produce the regular ones to those that are irregular. Example : He eated ten apples yesterday* d. Simple addition: the presence of an item which should not appear in a well-formed utterance. Example : The fishes doesn't live in the water* e. Misformation: the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure. Example : hisself* (himself) f. Archi-form: the selection of one member of a class of forms to represent others in the class. Example : this dogs* g Misordering: the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. Example : He is all the time late* On the other hand, if they are learning to understand the new language by listening or reading, the similarities between the two languages will make them easier to understand the new language. The similarities can be an advantage for language learners. Social Since language is essentially social phenomenon, the social influences on language learning are numerous and interrelated in complex ways. There are some contacts that are classified under social factors that influence the process of language learning; they are home, community, occupation, school, religious meeting, radio/television, and reading matters. These contacts make differences between English learned as a foreign language and learned as a second language, and community seems to be the contact that most differentiates the target language as a second language and the target language as a foreign language. The people with whom we continually use a target language have some effect on the manner and skill with which we use the language. Language learners can meet with the people and community. The community is very important for the learning and maintenance of a language. A learner of a target language who has no contact with a community in which the language is spoken will have more possible failure to learn or maintain his/her target language. Learning a target language only inside the classroom is quite different from the natural ways of learning. The process of learning a target language in the classroom is dominated by the teacher. The teacher becomes the only member of the community of the target language. Language learners almost find it impossible to be involved in social activities where the target language is used.

Interview Proforma for ELT Experts

A structured interview proforma was prepared for the ELT experts to solicit their opinion on English language pedagogy in Pakistan. The interview proforma comprised two sections. Section-1 was related to the provision of personal information of the ELT experts. Section-2, comprising 12 items of the open-ended questions, catered to the responses from the ELT experts on English language pedagogy in ISP Pakistan.

Data Analysis

The views of the ELT experts provided a useful context for interpreting and validating the questionnaire findings. The responses obtained from the ELT experts were analyzed qualitatively as follows:

Q1. How do you see the importance and scope of teaching of English as a foreign language in Pakistan? The ELT experts opined that the 'post-colonial social set-up and the economic state of the country' requires the use of English language both as its 'official language as well as the language of technology'. Despite the 'realization that language policy should be more inclusive' the role of English as a lingua franca due to its 'variety and innovation' needs to be underscored for the country's 'survival' in a competitive world. 'After the American War on Terrorism, the scope of English language has become even more important in Pakistan to express its view point in the same language on international and diplomatic forums.' English language will continue to be the 'language of knowledge economy, diplomacy, trade, commerce, science, and technology' across the globe; therefore, 'its teaching in Pakistan will be of great importance'. Overall, all the five ELT experts recognized the importance of English as a Foreign Language in Pakistan. This was in line with the perceptions of the teachers and the learners.

Q2. Which is the best teaching method for English language pedagogy at tertiary level education in Pakistan and why? Four of the five ELT experts were of the view that the 'Task based, Interactive, Communicative Method' is the best teaching method for English language pedagogy at tertiary level education in Pakistan. An expert opined that the 'communicative method focuses on the language use and practice and encourages the learners to learn the language NOT about the language'. Another expert mentioned that 'a unified practice of language use in all four skills can be suggested to the weaker students.' They should be encouraged to read more and 'an environment where they can practice language without any fear of humiliation should be created.' To this end, 'learners need to be motivated for learning of language first.' The emphasis by the experts on the provision of conducive to language learning environment relates to the actual EFL classroom practices at tertiary level education in Pakistan wherein the learners receive negative feedback from the teachers and are ridiculed by their fellow learners on the erroneous use of English language; hence they feel discouraged and de-motivated during the language learning process. Only one expert suggested that the 'Content-Focused Method' should be 'practiced' in EFL classrooms keeping in view the fact that 'both the teachers and the students often know the skills to convey material but lack the material or subject mastery. At tertiary level, what is important, is the knowledge of the contents of English to be taught.

Q3. What should be the intended outcomes of English language pedagogy at tertiary level education in Pakistan? Four of the five ELT experts considered communicative competence as the most important outcome of English language pedagogy at tertiary level education in Pakistan. An expert mentioned that 'the primary expectation is to enable the students to communicate effectively'. Another expert was of the view that 'the standard should be proficient in the use of English in carried situations' for the purposes of 'employment and research'. 'Learners should be fluent in all language skills; primary skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing as well as in secondary skills like vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and dictionary skills.' Only one expert considered that the 'cultural hybridization, beyond the many other outcomes, can be said to be the most important outcome of English language pedagogy at tertiary level education in Pakistan.' Opinions of the four ELT experts strengthen the results of the perceptions of 85 percent of the teachers who considered good pronunciation and oral communicative competence as the most important outcomes of English language pedagogic process at tertiary level education in Pakistan.

Q4. What do you think is important in English language learning process: learning use of grammatical rules, acquisition of communicative competence or any other skill? please specify. Three of the five experts considered that learning to use grammatical rules is more important than learning any other skill during English language learning process. An expert opined that the 'acquisition of grammatical rules during the English language learning process is more important than other factors like communicative competence or the stress on skills. Unless and until the students know about the structure (grammar), despite the fact of fluency as how much fluent they are, English cannot be learnt.' Another expert considered that 'communicative competence (Fluency) without knowing the basic rules is not enough. Similarly, mastering the grammatical rules without the ability to use English fluently and appropriately is

not sufficient either. We need to prepare a driver who is a mechanic as well'. Two experts opined that the 'acquisition of communicative competence is the main concern.' 'If the speakers are able to create meaning and express themselves, learning has successfully taken place.' The learners had also preferred the learning use of grammatical rules to the acquisition of communicative competence (see Table 4.9). Preference to grammar is unsurprisingly a product of the grammar-based written examinations at tertiary level education in Pakistan. Until examinations start accounting for the communicative aspect of English language use, traditional approaches will continue to exist.

Q5. Do you think that teachers' and learners' gender influence the teaching-learning process of English language at tertiary level education in Pakistan? if yes, how does it influence? Three of the five experts opined that gender influences the teaching-learning process of English language at tertiary level education in Pakistan. One of the experts expressed that 'definitely, gender matters during teaching-learning process. In a country like Pakistan, where the society is mainly orthodox, often it becomes difficult to explain things in front of the students generally and female students particularly. Slang terms, sex terminologies, taboo words etc. cannot be explained. In the same way many concepts like liberal humanism, Freud's Oedipus Complex, and Erotics are the philosophy which need explanation but the teachers cannot. In the same way, on part of the students as well, it often becomes difficult to ask for the explanation of such ontology.' Another expert opined that 'gender influence is general in teaching-learning process at tertiary level education in Pakistan. It is not a special case with English language learning and teaching only. Female participation is encouraging both for the male and the female learners in a classroom. It encourages the competition and facilitates the overall learning process.' Two experts were of the view that 'neither the competence nor the incompetence is gender bound. Both teacher and student can be equally receptive despite their gender.' 'Gender is not as significant as a variable as the level of motivation given the aptitude and commitment to learn.' It is important to mention that the teachers and the learners had also opined that sometimes gender plays an important role in English language pedagogic process.

Q6. Do you think that male and female teachers impact differently on the learning of EFL learners at tertiary level education in Pakistan? If yes, how is it different? Three of the five ELT experts considered that male and female teachers impact differently on the learning of EFL learners at tertiary level education in Pakistan. One of the experts mentioned that 'yes, male and female teachers impact differently on the learning of EFL learners because the female teachers tend to be more polite and cooperative comparatively. This has a significant impact on learners. Because of some cultural specific boundaries, female learners feel more comfortable with the female teachers. And male learners also find the female teachers more accommodating and cooperative.' Another expert said that 'the only difference between male and female teachers can be that of commitment. Female faculty members are overly enthusiastic. This can at times prove to be a hindrance in a language class where the atmosphere should always be light and easy.' Another expert opined that 'it is the role which is important and not the gender. Although, many a times, it is perceived that female teachers are lenient psychologically as compared to their male counterparts, but it is not the case always.' It was also expressed that 'quality of linguistic input is important rather than who is comes from.' The variables for creating difference in English language teaching could be the 'level of fluency and proficiencies rather than the gender'.

Q7. Do you think that teacher's gender causes discrimination in teacher-learner interaction in a gender-mixed EFL classroom at tertiary level education in Pakistan? If yes, please specify nature of discrimination. All the five ELT experts considered that teacher's gender causes discrimination among the learners during teacher-learner interaction in a gender-mixed EFL classroom at tertiary level education in Pakistan. One of the experts mentioned that 'in a society like that of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, students' perceptions, according to my view, are different in relation to the gender of the teachers. It is believed that male teachers have a soft attitude towards the female students.

My personal observation goes in line with the supposition that every class that I have taught, the ratio of competency of females to males is Another expert opined that 'learners' decisions and interactions may

be affected by gender. Even, female teachers may not be comfortable with male learners sometimes.’ The experts also considered that ‘this difference can go either way’ however, ‘female teachers would be less dominating and biased.’ An expert was of the view that at an early stage, ‘gender does pose some problems. But it entirely depends on how a teacher makes the students more comfortable in their skin. Once the gender-oriented shame is subsided, gender is not an issue any more, it’s determination to learn’.

Q8. Who do you think is more effective as a teacher at tertiary level EFL classroom in Pakistan? Male or female? Please give three reasons. Three of the five ELT experts considered that male teachers are more effective at tertiary level EFL classrooms in Pakistan. One expert opined that female teachers are more effective whereas another expert remained neutral in her opinion. One of the experts considered that ‘being a patriarchal society, teaching as a male in the EFL classroom in Pakistan will be effective on the basis of (a) Behavior control (b) Elaborating strategies (c) Display of strictness in class activities.’ An expert opined that male teachers are ‘more effective as they exhibit better situational and social understanding coupled with the academic excellence.’ Another expert expressed that ‘male teachers have a slight edge over their female counterparts as they are able to handle the classroom in a little more effective way as they can be dominant where required.’ One of the experts opined that ‘female teachers may be more effective because of their politeness, cooperation and being easy to interact; learners don’t feel any ego problem interacting with them.’ Another expert expressed that ‘competency of a teacher does not depend upon being male and female.....I receive appraisals of the performance of all the faculty members. The only difference between my male faculty members and female faculty members is that the male faculty members are a bit stricter. This is also particular to senior members.’ The male teachers, the male learners and the female learners had also expressed that the male teachers always teach more effectively than the female teachers whereas the female teachers had considered that it happens only sometimes.

Q9. Who do you think performs better in a gender-mixed EFL classroom at tertiary level education in Pakistan? Male or female learner? please give two reasons. Four of the five ELT experts opined that the female learners perform better in a gender-mixed EFL classrooms at tertiary level education in Pakistan whereas one expert opted to remain neutral on this question. An expert opined that ‘female learners perform far better in my observation as a teacher. It is a general trend apart from ELT classroom. Male learners engage themselves with activities other than learning / education. Female learners are more serious in their studies. One reason may be that in our society, female section finds it very hard to reach at higher level of education; and once they reach there, they find it obligatory to perform well in order to shine in family and in society. Other reason may be that female learners tend to be more intelligent and competent as compared to their male partners. This may have biological / genetic reasons.’ Another expert considered that female learners perform better in a gender-mixed EFL classroom due to ‘(a) Females work hard as compared to males (b) Females fear more about the results.’ Two other experts also expressed almost the similar opinion that female learners perform better than male learners in a gendermixed EFL classroom being ‘more responsible’ and ‘hardworking’. One of the experts mentioned that ‘anyone who takes his / her job seriously performs better in an EFL classroom irrespective of gender considerations’.

Q10 Which steps may be taken to obviate the gender-based obstacles in teaching-learning process of English language at tertiary level education in Pakistan? One of the experts expressed that ‘the most important issue is that of sense of security. Female / gender harassment is a BIG issue in the setting of Rural Sindh. Female students are being harassed in and out of the classroom. They even don’t share it with anyone because of the fear that they will be banned to come to University. We should promote awareness that “gender” is NOT an issue at all. All learners are equal before teachers and administration. We should redesign syllabus for our learners because in ELT syllabus there are some issues / problems which do not suit our social environment like discussing sex and sex related issues in English literature and poetry. It causes embarrassment sometimes.’ The experts opined that the teachers should be trained with a particular focus on how to keep the ‘gender biasness lowest’ and maintain ‘neutrality of the

situation'. The feeling must be inculcated in both male and female teachers and students that 'inside a classroom no one has a gender. They are the learners and the facilitators.' It was also suggested that 'gender-based curriculum should be removed from the textual studies.' Another expert suggested that 'classroom environment should be made friendly and conducive. Learning should be limited to the object of "LEARNING" only. Ethical considerations should be observed and the method should be content-centered.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study has investigated English Language Teaching in the institutions of higher education in Pakistan through the survey questionnaires and the structured interviews from the perspective of English as a Foreign Language inter alia perceptions of the teachers and the learners about English language teaching and learning, nature of gender-based teach-ability and learn-ability of English language, teacher-learner interaction in gender-mixed EFL classroom settings and impediments encountered by the teachers and the learners during English language pedagogic process at 4-year BS English classroom of public and private sector universities of Pakistan. The results of the study have rejected the H1, that is, EFL teachers perceive that Lecture Method best suits English language pedagogic process at tertiary level education in Pakistan. The results have transpired that the EFL teachers considered the Activity based Interactive Method as the best method for English language pedagogic process. The results have accepted the H2, that is, EFL learners perceive that the Grammar Translation Method best suits English language learning process at tertiary level education in Pakistan. The learners' preference for the Grammar Translation Method was expected due to their experience of English language learning at the primary and secondary level of education. However, the teachers' preference for the learner-centered Activity-based Interactive Method was unexpected due to the established practice of teacher-centric Lecture Method at the tertiary level education in Pakistan. The results have also rejected the H3, that is, EFL learners perceive that acquisition of oral communicative competence is the most important outcome of English language learning process at tertiary level education in Pakistan. Instead of the oral communicative competence, the EFL learners 271 preferred good pronunciation and learning use of grammatical rules for the want of accuracy than fluency to successfully get through the writing-base examinations. The results of the study have accepted the H4, that is, male EFL learners perceive that male EFL teachers give good grades to female EFL learners at tertiary level education in Pakistan and the H5, that is, EFL learners perceive that male EFL teachers teach more effectively than female EFL teachers at tertiary level education in Pakistan. The results have expounded that gender plays an important role in English language pedagogic process and teacher's gender is an important influence on the learning of male and female learners. The results have also indicated that the learners were well aware of their learning needs and accordingly, they made an informed choice towards the preferred gender of EFL teacher, that is, male teacher, for their English language learning process. The results of the study have also accepted the H6 and the Ho1. The results of the male and female learners showed a significant difference between the gender of male and female teachers towards teacher-learner interaction whereas the results of the male and female teachers did not show any significant difference between their genders towards teacher-learner interaction in EFL classroom settings. The Qualitative analysis of the responses from the ELT experts provided useful insight into ELT in Pakistan inter alia the role of gender in teaching and learning process, its implications and suggestions to obviate the gender-based obstacles for the effectiveness of English language pedagogic process at tertiary level education in Pakistan.

Recommendations

The ELT experts tendered the following suggestions for the improvement of English language pedagogic process at tertiary level education in Pakistan: 1) Selection process of teachers should be merit based and rigorous 2) Pedagogic trainings of teachers must be arranged before sending them to classroom 269 3) Teachers' incentives and motivation level should be increased 4) ELT syllabus should be thoroughly revised and updated 5) Racism should be removed from the subject of English 6) ELT materials and equipment should be provided 7) An all English-speaking culture within the classroom settings should be

created 8) A unified practice of English language use in all four skills, that is, listening, speaking, reading and writing should be ensured 9) Environment where learners can practice language without any fear of humiliation should be created 10) Learners should be encouraged to read more 11) Cross-cultural communication should be encouraged 12) Emphasis on using only English as a medium of communication for all the subject teachers may be provided 13) An overhauling of the educational policies at primary and secondary level of education in Pakistan should be initiated

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